

Transcript of  
Oral History Interview  
with  
**John Walsh**

by  
**Millie Rahn**

June 28, 2005

Bow, New Hampshire

Interviewed and transcribed by Millie Rahn, folklorist and oral historian

**Transcript of interview with John Walsh (JW) by Millie Rahn (MR) on June 28, 2005 at Mr. Walsh's home in Bow, New Hampshire. Total interview time: 124 minutes (2 hours, 4 minutes). Mr. Walsh is 91 at the time of this interview. The background noises are trucks passing on the road, birds singing, and a ceiling fan in the dining room where we did this interview on a very hot summer afternoon.**

Tape 1/Side A

MR: Today is Tuesday, June 28, 2005. I'm here in Bow, New Hampshire, at the home of John Walsh. We're going to talk about his life and memories of Manchester. Could you give me your full name, when and where you were born, and a little bit about where you grew up, where you went to school, what kind of neighborhood you lived in, and things like that?

JW: My name is John S. Walsh. I was born one, ten, fourteen [January 10, 1914] in Manchester, New Hampshire. On Auburn Street, Manchester. I grew up in Manchester [and lived there] all my life till I retired. I went to Wilson Grammar School. I finished eight grades and it came summer vacation.

You see, I was an orphan. Father and mother had passed away. [They had] two boys, two girls. I was the youngest of the four. People that were relatives took one [child each] and finally they ran out of relatives. Some very good friends that came from Ireland, where my father and mother came from, took me in and took care of me. At the time, I grew up, went to school, got out of school, and during the summer months I worked in the gardens, but I always had that paper route. Maybe I dwell on that a bit.

MR: The people that brought you up? That was in Manchester, too? You were born on Auburn Street, but where did you grow up?

JW: This is all in Manchester. I grew up in East Manchester. Silver Street. I went to Wilson School and graduated in 1930. When it came time to go back to school--high school--I wasn't thinking of high school because I was at a stage I needed to think seriously of paying back something to the people who had taken care of me. I thought it was time for me to go to work. They said to me, you better go to high school. So I went to high school for one semester, I guess it was. When I got out, I got working in the shoe factory.

MR: Do you remember which factory that was?

JW: There was Hoyt's Shoe, Silver and Lincoln Street in Manchester, and J.F. McElwain Shoe. That was on Silver Street, between Maple and Lincoln.

MR: So you worked in the shoe factory.

JW: I worked in the shoe factory finishing bottoms of shoes. It was a coupon job. Coupon that paid you your week's pay.

MR: So every time you'd finish something you'd get a coupon? Was that it?

JW: That's where I learned my mathematics. [Laughs] They paid so miserably low on a fraction. You didn't get a full cent. It was a fraction of a cent that you'd get, and of course, you had to do so many shoes. My working there was short. I got introduced to politics on the ward level--Ward 8, East Manchester--and became acquainted with a gentleman barber by the name of Tetu, T-E-T-U, on Wilson Street and later on Valley Street. I'm at the age of 21 at this time and this barber wanted to know if I would run for representative.

MR: Mr. Tetu was the barber?

JW: The barber. He was French. I was Irish. He wanted to know if I was interested in running for representative. I told him I never even gave it a thought. It was never in my mind. He said why? I said, well, I'm an Irish young man and I'm living in a predominantly French neighborhood, and I don't think that if I ran— The French are going to support a French candidate and there's not enough Irish to elect an Irish candidate. He told me I was all wrong. He said why do you take that attitude? I said, hey, I grew up with the French kids in a French neighborhood. I have nothing against them. It's just the way I feel. The Irish go Irish, the French go French. That's the way I feel and under those circumstances, I wouldn't want to put a lot of work into something I didn't gain anything.

He said that's not true. I want you to eliminate that idea. So I said okay. He said, I'll help you. I want you to find out how the system works. Why he picked me, I don't know. [Laughs] I really don't know. Unless he followed me around on the paper route, everyday, week in and week out.

MR: It sounds like you had a lot of initiative.

JW: I knew I couldn't be living off somebody else. These people took care of me from the time my mother died and I just couldn't go on living off of them. They had two sons of their own.

MR: And that was during the height of the Depression.

JW: Height of the Depression. He was working in the Amoskeag Mills and she was taking care of the home. I felt it was a responsibility. I wanted to go to work and help. So I went along with this and to make a long story short, when the election time

came, I tied the votes with another Irishman. We had a recount. I picked up votes and he lost votes, and I became one of the representatives from Ward 8, Manchester.

MR: And that was on the city council? Is that right?

JW: No, no. That's the state. State representative.

MR: So you went to Concord.

JW: Now I've got to face the barber. So the barber says to me, what do you say now? You ran and you were elected. I said I have to take it back. [Laughs] He said I want you to forget that attitude that you have, French against Irish, Irish against French. I say it's not the Irish against the French; it's not that at all. It's just that I feel loyalty when it comes to voting. Loyal nationality goes a long ways. He said well, in this case, it didn't work, he said, because you got elected. You got tied and broke the tie and won by one vote. That's all you needed. I got more than one vote, but one was all I needed. So he said to me, I want you to go to Concord and I want you to sit there and listen so that you know how the system works. Don't get involved. Go as an observer. See the people that are active; how they're working; what they're doing; the committees and what have you. He said that's what I want you to do. I never want you to be a politician.

So I went to Concord and came back. I went down to see the barber and he said to me how did you do? I said it was very interesting. He said okay, I'm glad. Now remember, play the game but don't get involved. I don't want you to be a politician. Myself, I think he had some prior interest in politics. He had to, to put me in that.

MR: Was he the ward leader? The ward boss or the ward leader?

JW: No, no, no. He was just a barber. He lived in the same area.

MR: So he was kind of looking after you as a mentor, teaching you the ways of the world.

JW: I knew nothing of that type, but I found out that he had that interest. Why? I don't know, but he did.

Now it seems like I'm hedge hopping, but it involves the barber. I got involved in the credit union. The barber has one of his sons, who was the city auditor of Manchester. This man knew nothing at all about what went on with me and his father. So he comes over to me, after we get going on the credit union. I had to do business with him because of payroll deduction. We got payroll deductions from the aldermen and he had to get it on the records. He and the treasurer. So I had to meet with both of them.

We had meetings and he and I became mutual friends. He knew nothing at all about what had happened. He had another brother. This is the barber's son, who was a priest. The priest would occasionally come across the aisle and come into the credit union and talk with me. The city auditor said to me, John, if you need some help at some time, you know, if you need to hire a girl, would you be interested in hiring my sister? I said right now I don't need anybody but yes, I'll be interested. Long story short, I made the connection and I hired the girl. He didn't know why I hired her, but I did. It was because of their father. The girl didn't know it.

MR: How long were you a representative?

JW: I was a representative for two years.

MR: Two years. The credit union was in about 1949?

JW: The credit union was in there. That was, let's see, 1949. Active on the board. I became chairman of the last of the finance committee, I believe; chairman of the finance committee.

The City of Manchester went bankrupt in the '30s [sic], which meant that they couldn't financially do anything unless the bills had to be approved by the state. The state had to nominate and elect people to serve on the committee. That committee reviewed the bills and if they said the bill was okay, they got paid. Now this is the state, not the city. We're in the city. I'm a city alderman. John King is the governor of the state of New Hampshire at the time [1963-1969]. When the opening came for another finance committee member, I got the appointment because I was, forget politics, I was a friend of his.

MR: So you went from being a state rep—

JW: No, I'm still a state rep. I'm a state rep and I'm a representative in the credit union and I'm the chairman of that finance committee. The finance committee is doing business in the city auditor's office. Remember that man, the barber? His son is auditor.

So moving along for the barber, I got defeated as an alderman. I'm serving my last meeting on the committee in accounts. That finance chairman, Armand Tetu, said to me, John, this being your last meeting, I'd like to take you down to the 88 Club and have a drink and socialize for a few minutes; reminisce. I said fine. So we went down there. While we were there, I said to the auditor, Armand, I got something to tell you. He said you have? I said yes, I think you should know it. I won't be sitting on the committee. I won't be doing business with you anymore.

I said did you know that I knew your father really well? He almost passed out. He said how'd you know my father? I said, well, let me say this to you: did you ever know that your father was the one that got me interested in politics? [Mimics in loud voice] My dad got you interested in politics? I said that's right. Your dad picked me out of a group of newsboys and said to me, I want you to run for representative. He started crying. He said all the time that you served with me, you knew that? We got into some pretty close arguments, he said. You knew that about my dad and you never said a word? I said there was no reason to. Business was business, and that wasn't the business. Now I'm all done and now I'm telling you. He said to me, what about my sister? I said well, I hired your sister, but not because you asked me. You did ask me and let me know, but because of your dad. For what he did; the interest he had in me. I couldn't do anything but.

MR: What was his father's name? Was it also Armand as well?

JW: I don't know what the first name was. The son's name was Armand. Maybe it was Armand, Senior, I don't know. All I could ever call him was Barber. That's all I referred him to. He had snow white hair.

MR: Could we back up a minute? Do you know how your parents got from Ireland to Manchester?

JW: Ireland was in a bad time. The Irish were getting persecuted over there. One of the uncles, one of the brothers, came to America and he got established. He went to work in the Amoskeag Mills. After he got going, he wrote back home and said you better get out of Ireland. Come to America. They didn't have the money to come, but the uncle that was working in the mills sent them the money to come. So they came that way. That's how my parents came to America.



My father was a bartender in Manchester from what they told me and what I saw as a picture. My mother worked in the mills. My father had a cold and he was out with, as the story goes, with my sisters and maybe my brother, but I was too young to be with them. They went to visit relatives at Christmastime. He had a bad cold and he came home and took seriously ill. He was dead by the end of December and buried on New Year's Day. My mother was left with four [children]. I was the youngest. She went to work in the mills, developed TB [tuberculosis], entered a sanitarium, and she left the four of us. Again, an uncle took one, another took another one, another uncle took another one, and on. I went with some people that came from Ireland that boarded in my mother's house. They didn't have any children; they took me. Later they became parents of two of their own. They had two children of their own and me.

Representative served on ward committee and got them real involved in politics on a local level. I mentioned John King was the governor. Emil Simard was a representative. Emil lived in the same ward that I did. He was the alderman. He ran for governor's council and said to me, you run for alderman. I ran and got elected.

MR: For the record, tell me what an alderman does.

JW: An alderman, he checks the bills for the city; approves contracts. They have committees: street lighting, sewerage, water, different departments. All for funds. They get the funds and the aldermen approve it with the mayor.

#### Tape 1/Side B

MR: Down the line, somebody who reads this transcript might not know what an alderman does, even though it sounds like a silly question.

JW: I know. I'm familiar.

MR: So you were the alderman.

JW: I served as an alderman for two terms and later ran for governor's council. Defeated once. Elected once. Defeated twice, actually. Once before election and once after election I was defeated. Served with Walter Peterson, governor [1969-1973]. He was not of my party. I was a Democrat. He was a Republican, but he was a very fine gentleman and a governor.

MR: Would that have been in the 1940s or '50s?

JW: I think it was later than the '50s.

MR: I'll look it up. Don't worry. That's no problem.

JW: When was the end of the political shenanigans there? I served with Roland Vallee as mayor [1964-1967] for two years. Chairman of a well-known personnel committee. The City of Manchester never had a classification of their employees. If you wanted a job, you had to know an alderman or you couldn't get in. [Laughs]

MR: That was the old way.

JW: So we, as a board with the mayor, we voted to have reclassification. Every job in the city would be classified according to what they did and how much they received and what they would receive finally. J.L. Jacobs' firm was the firm out of Chicago that did the reclassification.

MR: So you were right in the thick of all that.

JW: Roland Vallee, who was the mayor, picked me as an alderman, but picked me as chairman of that committee. That is a very tough committee. There were senior aldermen. I said to the mayor, I said you know I appreciate very much what you're doing,

but if you want to be mayor you're going down the wrong road. Some of the senior aldermen are going to be madder than hell at you and they're going to work against you. He said I don't give a damn. I'm the mayor. I want you as chairman of that committee. I said that's up to you. He said do you want to know why? I said yes. He said because I can trust you. You tell me and I can trust you, what's going on in that committee; and they won't. That's why you're going to be chairman and I don't care. He got beat and I got beat, but we ran that personnel committee.

It came that the J.L. Jacobs firm did the reclassification. That took place in Armand Tetu's office. He's in on all of this. So we have to watch this closely, because they're taking a guy's job and they're saying this job is not the way it's supposed to be. We're changing what you do. We're not changing what you do, it's what they call what you do. Some jobs got upgraded and some got downgraded, according to how popular you were.

Anyways, it came that the reclassification was over. Now we got to appoint someone to run that department: personnel. Personnel director. Of course, the committee that I was chairman of, there were members in there that were interested in having something to say about who was going to be the personnel director. I had something to say about it too, so I called from my office to Mr. Jenkins, who worked for J.L. Jacobs. He was an employee of J.L. Jacobs performing that reclassification. That was the man that I picked to be the personnel director to get the department going.

So at that time, I called Wilbur Jenkins. He was working up in Maine, doing a reclassification up in Portland, Maine. I said to him I want you to come to Manchester and when you come to Manchester, bring with you what you will require the city to pay

you to do the job of personnel director. [Laughs] He said to me I don't want the job. I said that's fine but I want you as the personnel director. He's not married at the time. He says to me I'm not interested; I'm not interested. I said come to Manchester with your resumé and how much you're going to charge us to be the personnel director.

He came to Manchester and he told me what he was going to charge. It amounted to he'd be the highest-paid city official in Manchester. If we hired him, he'd be the highest-paid city official. I said to him holy gee! That's pretty steep. He said I told you I didn't want the job. I said is that your final figure? He said yes.

A lot of this stuff I don't think you should put down.

I said you come on up and we'll see. We had a meeting. The committee went over to the Carpenter Hotel. They had people that they wanted and didn't care what I was doing. They had an idea. So I had a meeting with the mayor downstairs, where his office was. Wilbur was with me. We went down. Of course, he knew Wilbur because he was doing the reclassification. We sat down. I told the mayor, I said this is the man that to me, he's the only man that could take that job and do it right. The mayor wasn't interested in that part of it. He said how much do you expect to get paid? He said. The mayor said no way! He said I don't want you to think that I'm saying you're not qualified or anything. There isn't a city official in Manchester that's getting that kind of money. It will just raise up the roof off of City Hall. Wilbur sat there and laughed. He did! But he put the damned price up there. It wasn't a ridiculous price, countrywide, but citywide, it was out.

So I said to the mayor, you've got to think very serious. I know it's high, but this job is very important. If you want somebody who's going to do that job, Mr. Jenkins is number one because he can tell any city employee, and they're all going to come up here,

[mimics] why did you do this? Why did you do that? Why did you change that? Can you answer them, Mayor? I said you can't. That's why he put me chairman. I wasn't on that committee when they were reclassifying. I said we hired Jacobs because Jacobs said that all the recommendations, they were the people to do it. Now, I said, the city employees are going to come in because they're mad. They're madder than hell. They don't want a personnel department and reclassification. They don't want it.

I said you better think seriously about what's going to happen. He said to me we can't, John; we can't do it. I said if that's your answer, and I'm giving you plenty of time to think about it, I said Wilbur's here and he came here on my request. I asked him to come here. I said I want him as personnel director. That's it. Money to do the job may be high, but he's worth it. The mayor says I'm sorry, Mr. Jenkins, no hard feelings. I'm not taking it out on you because of your name or your qualifications or anything, it's just too much money. I said that's your answer? He said yes.

I said, Mayor, in 30 minutes I'll be down with my resignation. I'm resigning as chairman of the personnel committee. I said I'm not holding the bag on this. I said I can't answer the questions that the city employees are going to give. You can't answer those questions. There's one girl up in the auditor's office that can do a pretty good job, but she's not running for personnel director. Wilbur Jenkins can answer any damn question that comes up. That's the man. He said to me, you wouldn't do that to me. I said, Mayor, this is me. Not you. I'm chairman of that committee. I said I'm not going to hold the bag on it. It's over. You did what you want. You know where I stand. He pounded! [Mimics] Go over to the Carpenter Hotel and tell your friends Wilbur Jenkins is the new personnel director.

MR: Wow! So he took the job?

JW: He took the job and he retired from the City of Manchester. He was like a brother to me. I told him. I said I don't want you ever to feel that you owe me anything. I did what I had to do. You did what you had to do, I said, and that's it. You don't owe me nothing. His father, his mother, his wife, all his family, they wanted to adopt me. [Laughs] I said to him hey, that's the kind of stuff that we had, you know? Walter got beat and I got beat as aldermen. I got beat as governor's council. So sometimes when you do the right thing, it don't work out. But up here, I feel good. That was the politics.

The governor was the same thing. The governor had an issue regarding the budget; money. He said I'm going to vote for a sales tax. I said that is dynamite. Dynamite. I said you're going to get beat. He said if I get beat doing something right, I don't mind it. I said to him if you're going to vote for it, I believe in you; I'm voting with you. He says that's up to you, John. You're good enough to say it. I said there's going to be two votes, yours and mine, and we're going to get beat. He said we'll get beat. We got beat. We got beat in the election too.

That poor mayor is dead and gone and his poor wife is totally blind. She's down in Florida. Roland Vallee is dead and gone. The last time I saw him, he said to me, one thing I did that I don't regret, he said, and that's you. He said you stuck with me all the way. And I did! I said only because you're right in my book.

That Irish lady that brought me up pounded into my head-- Because I went eight grades, grammar school. That was the only thing in my education. I was coming down from a meeting with the mayor and he asked me something pertaining to trustworthiness. I said to him, I'm going to tell you something that Gramma Kane-- He knew Gramma

Kane because she always called him up. She was interested in politics. Gramma Kane, from the time I was able to make any kind of sense, had this saying:

Be upright and honest,  
Purest and bold.  
And always remember,  
That honor is dearer than gold.

MR: You called her Gramma? What was her name?

JW: Gramma Kane. That's the woman who brought me up. Her name was Sabina Kane, but I always called her Gramma Kane. He says to me, where the hell did you ever come up with that, John? I said that Gramma Kane had two sons of her own and they couldn't tell you a word of that. But she hounded me and hounded me and hounded me, and I never forgot it. Ninety years. He said I want that in writing. [Laughs]

MR: Do you want to talk about some of the things that you remember? The changes from when you were growing up in the city? When the highway went through? When the presidential primaries started coming?

JW: When I was growing up in Manchester, all the sewerage ran into the Merrimack River. And then Washington provided legislation and stressed to the city you better clean up those conditions. The Merrimack River was one. We had to eliminate putting the sewerage into the river. So we built a building. It was like an incinerator and it took care of all the sewerage. There used to be big, huge pipes and they came from all districts of the city and the Amoskeag mills, all that, that went into the river. But the river's clean now, the fish are back in it, and people are enjoying it.

That was one good, wonderful thing that happened to this area. Yes. Because you know? Hey, it went down. It went down a little. Yes. The mills up north, the paper mills, and all that? They had to clean that river. That was one.

The Amoskeag Mills had the strike. I was too young to really remember the jilt of it, but the man, Gramma Kane's husband, worked in the mill. He was a shovel operator and he provided the coal. He'd scoop up the coal into the trucks and take them over to the mills. He worked there. Then when the mills went on strike, well, the people just didn't get paid. They had to extend credit. The grocer— You heard about that French individual, had a grocery store--Pidgeon's Market—and he said we understand you always paid your bills. Whatever you want, come down and we'll put it on a slip and when you get straightened out, we expect you to pay us back. And that happened. But it was bad. It was real bad. I was young. In the '30s.

MR: Do you remember the flood in 1936?

JW: The Merrimack River flowed over its banks. There was, I guess, it was a slight hurricane and that Pine Island Park got hit and hit hard. There was a lot of damage done to properties around, you know? Not like the hurricanes of today, but that one there, the river overflowed its bank all the way down and did a lot of damage to properties and homes and Pine Island Park, like I say.

And the airport. Bill DePew—William DePew—was the airport manager. Of course, when they developed the airport it should have been, but it wasn't, it was Manchester-Londonderry. Londonderry's got a part of that airport even today. Gramma Kane's husband, again, with his shovel, took the first scoop out of the beginning of the construction of the airport. Of course, it was a small airport at the time; nothing like what



it is today. He operated a steam shovel down in the mill, and when the mills were defunct, he got down to the airport. It might have been through one of the government-sponsored programs. You know, the WPA [New Deal's Works Progress Administration] and stuff. He operated that [shovel] and took the first scoop of the airport.

MR: That's quite an honor.

JW: Yes. It became a military base, sort of, because during the war [World War II], the Army and Air Force used that. Maybe limited, but they did use the base. I remember I received a pass to go to the club. The officers club.

MR: What did you do during the war?

JW: What did I do? I welded at the Portsmouth Navy Yard. I worked in J.F. McElwain's on shoes and the type of the job that I had in the shoe shop was out of business. They were going to make military shoes and they said we'll give you a job, but it won't be like what you had. What I had was next to nothing. I don't know how the hell they could give me anything any worse. So I worked days in the shop and went to welding school on Webster Street. They had a welding school and if you passed two tests, you qualified to go to Portsmouth. They showed you at night, when we went there. We went there from maybe six o'clock until nine. They showed you how to start welding. You have to have the heat and the arc and the glasses and the burns and what have you. They gave us all that. They gave you two pieces of metal. The metal is grooved; v-shaped. [end of Tape 1/Side B]

Tape 2/Side B

JW: V-shaped. Two pieces. Then you had to fill that and then reinforce it. They put it through a test. Hydraulic machine come down and hit that metal and bent it. If the weld was good, it held. If it didn't, it'd break open. You had to pass two of those tests and if you passed through two, you went to the Portsmouth Navy Yard. That was like going from the poor box— [Laughs] Getting a job at the Navy Yard was like hitting the jackpot in Las Vegas.

I went to school, passed two tests, and they allowed me to go to Portsmouth. I had two children, a wife, and a home that I was paying for. We traveled back and forth, from Manchester to Portsmouth, New Hampshire. I did that seven days a week. I developed a cold. Kept working seven days a week. Developed pneumonia. Real bad. I received the last rites of the church. My heart collapsed and they called the doctor. He gave me a shot of adrenaline they said. It's what got me out of it.

After I got through with that, I couldn't weld anymore. Welding was out. The doctor said to me your mother had TB and the test that you took, your lungs were clear. I'll okay you, but you can't go back to the Yard. So I had to go back and tell the lead man that I had, who was a fantastic individual, I said I can't weld any more. He said what? I said I can't weld. The doctor said the smoke would kill me. He said to me, Walshy, you come back down here. I'll give you a broom. You sweep the floor and you'll get your welder's pay. He said you took care of me when you were here; now it's my turn. That's the kind of guy he was. He made me promise. He said promise me you won't give up; you'll come back to me. But I knew in my heart I couldn't do it. So I went and got what was coming to me in money, and I walked off. He was a great guy. And I loved welding.

It was a dangerous job, but-- After that, where'd I go? No smoke! I wound up as a firefighter.

MR: How did that happen?

JW: That was in 1946. [19]'46 the fire department, '49 the credit union. I was active in the fire department. Served on the wage committee to improve the wages of the firemen. They were very low compared to others. I served nine years, I think it was; '46 to '54. I think it was nine years. I went from private to a junior lieutenant.

MR: Did you actually go out and fight fires with the smoke?

JW: I had to go out and fight fires. [Laughs] Luck was with me. It wasn't that bad for the time that I had.

Then I went down and got involved in the credit union. The credit union was established while I was on the fire department. Manchester Municipal Employees Credit Union. That's Members First now. I was appointed by the firemen to go to that meeting and when I went there, I came out as treasurer. They couldn't get a volunteer. President got up there, secretary, and different committees. Came to treasurer, there were all smart, see? They knew what it involved. They had nothing, but up the line it was going to be a tedious job. The fellow from Madison, Wisconsin, said we got to have a treasurer, but nobody showed. [Mimics] C'mon now, c'mon. I put my hand up. I'll take it.

My sister's lying in there [another room in house during interview]; she's not well. We were up to the house. They had a mess of books for treasurer. They wanted to have a meeting, so I said go up to the house. We lived in a big block in East Manchester. We walked into the house and they said, [mimics] meet the new treasurer of the Manchester Municipal Employees Credit Union. My sister said don't tell me that you

made him treasurer of the credit union! They said yeah, he's the new treasurer. My God, they said. He went to grammar school. They said he'd do it all right. What the hell! I said there's no money. Nobody's given any money yet. I said if I get a hundred dollars, I know it's a hundred dollars. So I went from that to three million. When I got through, I gave them three million dollars. They're into 30 million now, or better. That there opened a door. There was more exposure for the credit union than there was to politics, I think.

MR: It's certainly a major legacy.

JW: Oh yes. They sent me to Madison, Wisconsin, to credit union school. I served as treasurer of the Manchester Municipal and the first president of the New Hampshire Credit Union League. Served as president until I retired. Served as the national director for the state of New Hampshire on credit unions. That's about it on the credit unions.

I had met a lot of the leaders. Tom Doig, who is president of the association. You're in Boston, right? Did you ever hear of Agnes Gartland? Do you know where 5 Park Square is? Well, Agnes Gartland had an office at 5 Park Square. She came to our first meeting. She was also a secretary to Edward Filene and Roy Burgesson. I think they're all dead now. So I met her. Then out in Madison I met a lot of them.

I took my two girls out to Madison, Wisconsin. I had to go out to graduation from the credit union school. I took the two girls; they were just little ones. I took them out. While we were there, that weekend Notre Dame was playing University of Wisconsin. They got us all tickets. The kids went and they had the big platform. They never forgot it. I drove all the way out. Drove out and drove back. Yes!

MR: Did you travel much throughout your life?

JW: With the league. They had conventions in different areas. I would attend those as a national director from New Hampshire.

MR: Did you go down to Boston much?

JW: Oh yes, I went down to Boston. I was down in Boston. Hartford, Connecticut. I'm trying to think. Out West.

MR: When you were growing up and when you had your own family, where would you go shopping? Would you shop in Manchester? Did you go to the malls when they opened up the malls?

JW: Elm Street was the main drag. All the stores were on Elm Street. Leavitt's. Varrick's. Hill's. Bessie Eldridge. State Theatre was the movie house. Bell's Theatre was another one. Crown Theatre was another on Hanover Street. Granite Street had a movie house. East Manchester had the Empire Theatre.

MR: Before those were movie houses, what were they?

JW: Pine Elm had a roller skating rink. Massabesic Lake had skating, had boating, had dancing. Mel Howlett. The big bands, some of them, went out there. The streetcar drove. That was the transportation to the outer skirts of the city. Massabesic Lake and Pine Elm Park. Uncanoonic Mountains in the western part of the state. Very seldom do they talk about the Uncanoonic Mountain. It still exists, but it's not a resort.

MR: What would you go there for? Fishing? Boating?

JW: There was no fishing or boating, because of the altitude. You'd go there to view the city; an outing. Picnicking. They had transportation if you went there, other than your own car. To get up to the top, they had a means of mechanized—

MR: Like a tram?

JW: --that would take you to the summit. A lot of people would go up there and while they were there, blueberry. That was blueberry country.

Derryfield Park. That was another one that had a tower on top of it. It was a place that they would play baseball, football, not so much basketball. That was about the two sports. Today they have basketball courts and tennis courts. Fireworks on the Fourth of July. Always fireworks at Derryfield Park. Textile Field was the ballpark. Valley and Maple street.

MR: When we started talking, you were talking about the French and the Irish, in particular, in the city. Was there tension between the two groups in schools or churches?

JW: No. We had neighbors, both sides of us, French. At Christmastime they'd go back and forth. They'd come over and sing a song in French, have a drink, and socialize. No, never tension to speak of, no. The kids, why yes. I learned to speak French and they learned to speak English.

MR: I was going to ask if you spoke French.

JW: I didn't learn the good part of French [laughs], but I learned a lot as a (swine?). We were friends down through the years. Very good, very good.

MR: Were there other ethnic groups in your neighborhood besides the French and the Irish?

JW: Yes, there were. Not in great numbers, but there were Polish, Greek, German. See, when they migrated to Manchester, like everything else, the first ones came and settled in one spot and then the rest of them, when they came, they didn't want to come over here where the French were. They wanted to go where their people were. So they

developed a Greek section and they developed a Polish section, and Skunk's Misery and Slug Town; all the different names. German on the west side and the French on the west side. The Irish were spread around pretty much. They intermingled more than the other nationalities, I'd say.

MR: Were the churches separated?

JW: Yes. We had Our Lady of Perpetual Help. That was the church in East Manchester. I served as an altar boy at that church for maybe five years while I was going to school. I enjoyed it. St. Joseph's Cathedral, which was down in the area of the city library. There was St. Patrick's. Now we're over on the west side. Of course, I can't tell you the German churches. I can only vouch on the Catholic church. Protestant church? First Presbyterian on Valley Street.

The Masons' building was on Elm Street in the north end. A lot of social clubs in Manchester. The Irish-American. The Lafayette Club. Mt. Royal. French, in East Manchester.

MR: There was probably a Polish club somewhere.

JW: Yes, there was a Polish club. There were two Polish clubs: one on Manchester Street and one on Chestnut Street.

MR: What do you think has changed for the best for the city? And maybe what has changed not so much for the best in your lifetime?

JW: What changed for the best? I think that when they changed to classification for city employees, that was an important feature. There were so many things, you go blank on them. The airport in the beginning and what we have today, that was a big change. The location of the new shopping centers. Manchester had one of the malls that

was going to locate in South Manchester off Willow Street. Of course the opposition came and they moved over to the west side, over on the other side of the river. But the place that should have been was in Manchester, and later the Mall of New Hampshire is down there.

MR: It went to Bedford, right?

JW: Yes.

MR: What about the highways, 93 and 293?

JW: Oh that was federal money. Getting the federal money was rough. We experienced that. We got money paid in small amounts, but we managed to get it. The highways going west. The Everett Turnpike, I-93 on the east side, 101 going to the beach. Route 4/202/9, they were going to run that highway from Keene to Portsmouth. Well, the highway runs to Portsmouth and you can get over to Keene, because I've been over there lately. You can get over there, but it took a long time and the road is not what they were going to do. They've got road service. It's good, but it isn't the type that was planned. The roads to the mountains are Route 3.

MR: With your background in politics and government, what about the presidential primaries? Did you ever get involved in any of that?

JW: Oh, I did. I was involved in Muskie's campaign [Edmund Muskie's presidential campaign of 1972]. I was involved in Jack Kennedy's campaign [in 1960]. There was one, another one, Coonskin Cap. He was out West. I can't think of his name. That was his nickname.

Muskie was quite a campaigner. When he got to be in the Union-Leader, that crying, that finished him. They knew how to get you, you know? I packed papers for that



damned Union-Leader as a kid. We got two dollars a week. It was miserable. When I ran for councilor? No way, because I was a Democrat. They would not support me. That paper was miserable and that was Loeb and his wife, Nackie. One is dead; I don't know about both of them. Bill Loeb, he's gone, but Nackie, I don't know. If she isn't gone, she's not in the best of health. They did have strong-- Politics is a tough, tough business.

MR: To follow up on that idea, who would you say really ran Manchester? Was it the Union-Leader? Was it the church? Was it the mayor?

JW: The merchants and the Union-Leader. It stands to reason. If you're in business, you're not going to support another one coming in as a competitor. Keep them out! We had an industrial agent and he was supposed to bring new industry in, but if he would get someone-- [Mimics] The opposition, we don't want them. The shopping center moving over to the west? That was all that merchants. I was on the aldermanic board at the time and I was told, if you vote for that to go down on South Willow Street, we'll see that you don't get elected. I won't mention no name, but I'll make that comment. They did not want anybody else in there. [End of Tape 2/Side A]

#### Tape 2/Side B

JW: Thursday night, downtown Manchester was humming. It was good. That was back when Judy [daughter] was going to high school, so it had to be around in the '50s.

MR: That was all along Elm Street?

JW: All those stores along there, yes.

MR: It was also people from outside of Manchester that went shopping there, too, didn't they?

JW: Oh yes. They came into Manchester. Manchester was the hub, like. Leavitt's store used to do a lot of business. Hale's. J.B. Varrick's. That was a big outfit in Manchester. Even some of the shoe shops had stores that they ran selling shoes. Beebee Shoe. J.F. McElwain. Thom McCann.

Public Service. See, the Public Service? A big outlet; big outlet. They called it the Amoskeag Dam. It's a waterway that goes from east side to west side. After that flood, they couldn't control the waters, so they built the dam. The Public Service, I don't know how they did it. I wasn't in power in any way. Some of us people felt that the city of Manchester should have taken the dam. That water rights. Public Service used it to generate their electricity. The City of Manchester could have done the same thing and billed the people for the use of the electricity, which they didn't. Public Service, that was another issue that we felt Manchester missed the gold ring. You know? When you were a kid you went roller-skating. There was a gold ring up there. You'd grab that gold ring. Well, that dam was the gold ring and we missed it. Public Service got it.

MR: What are the biggest changes that you see today when you go into the city?

JW: They've got a new sport arena. That is, to me, a wonderful thing because it provides the types of entertainment that the people wanted. They had to go to Massachusetts or somewhere else to get [it], but now they can go right there in their own city, right off the main drag. That's just south of Cedar Street. The arena. Have you seen it?

That was a big improvement; that they can feature different things. The local people that have ball clubs and different sports organizations, they can get in there. I haven't been there, but Judy tells me that she's gone down and listened to some of the big

bands, big top-notch entertainers. She said it goes over big, and I'm glad. Manchester needed that. That was a big improvement in my book.

Homes for the elderly. They provided quite a bit of that.

See, I retired in 1978, '79. When I retired I left and I went to Florida, because I couldn't take the winters up here. I loved the winters when I was a kid, but as I grew up-- In the City Hall, I'd have to walk up Hanover Street to the post office, which is a block up. Every year I'd notice.

MR: Yes, with your respiratory problems.

JW: See, I've got leaky valves to the heart. I can't exert too much because I won't be able to move. I didn't always have that, but I knew it was coming. I said I know that I can't do this much longer. [19]'78 came and I said to the board I'm done! They wouldn't believe it, so I sent them all a letter and I sent the bank commissioner another letter informing him that I was done. The responsibility was off of my shoulders.

MR: That was 'done' with the credit union?

JW: That's with the credit union, yes. That was the only employment that I had. I said to the board, did you get your letter? They said yes. [Mimics] I want to tell you, in case you think that I'm playing around, I'm real serious. From January 1, I'm gone. And I said, so that you understand how serious, I sent a copy of your letter to the bank commissioner. [Laughs] They knew of it. I was treasurer and manager of the credit union as long as I stayed in city government. I was a league president from the time the league started, and I was instrumental in getting it started, until I resigned.

But you know, there's politics in everything. If they're out to get you, you've got to know it. I knew some of the things that I did they didn't like. They didn't like it. Of course, there were others that did like it, but up here, I did what I could live with.

I was in favor of a situation and we went out. I was a national director and I had a vote. The president had a vote and he was there. He said to me, where you going? I said I'm going up to the stage. This is before the meeting started. That's where the candidates were. He said what are you doing up there? I said that's none of your business. I'm going up to the stage. I got business.

I went up and I saw this individual—and I don't want to put that down in the record—I said to him, you know who I am? He said, yes, I know who you are. I said well, I got something to say to you. You're running for secretary? He said yes. Well, I said, you know there's a lot of people out there that will tell you that they're going to vote for you, but they won't. But, I said, I'm going to tell you that I won't vote for you and you'll know it. I came up here for one thing in mind: to let you know that if it's one vote you're going to get beat, it's going to be mine. He said after all I did for you? I said you did nothing for me. I was a national director and you forwarded national directors invitations to your annual meeting. Because I was national director and I was president of the New Hampshire Credit Union League, I was entitled to one. I said beside the point. I just want you to know beforehand. That's the way I do business, I said. I'm a politician too. I said if you're going to get beat by one vote, I'm the vote. I said you can do what you want about it, but when that vote comes out, you're going to be missing my vote. He said after all I did for you? I said you can die with that feeling [laughs], but you didn't do anything for me. I said I'm doing something for you. I'm telling you. Go out and get that

one vote. You know there's one vote that's going to go against you. Go out and get another one that will be for you.

As you know, when it comes time for election, the guns are out. But I said to him, I'm resigning. They said why are you resigning? My health wasn't the best; breathing. I said I can't take it. But I had in mind that they were going to give me the axe, and before they give me the axe, I'm going to beat them. So things that you have to do. You know? That was it. Now I don't know if that's going to be a good one or a bad one. Like I said, I told you as it was. Some people will be amazed to know what I said in that report [oral history].

MR: It's what I said in that letter I sent to you; that there's no right or wrong answers. You can only speak from your own experience and what you did. That's why we do this [oral history project]. If everybody was just reciting something, it wouldn't mean anything.

JW: I don't know why Leo— I knew of Leo [current city clerk Leo Bernier], but I didn't know him that well. He took over as city clerk. Mike Quinn was the city clerk for years and he held onto that job because he had the support. Nobody could beat him. Leo got in there and for some reason--not from me, he heard it from others somewhere--he referred to me as an icon. [Laughs] He said you're an icon! I said icon?

You know, when I was there, I did what I thought was right and now as the credit union got bigger, they changed their policies and they're not supposed to do that. People that need money should get consideration. I cited an example to him. I said two people come in to you that want a loan. They both want a loan for a car. One has a late-model car and the other one has a car that's not as late as this. You give preference to that guy

because he's got a better car. You give that guy a better rate, interest-wise, than this one. This poor slob has got a family, got sickness, got a job working for the city, gets paid every week, needs help. This one here, he can get the money. He has no problem. I don't mind you giving him a loan, but geez, don't give him preference over this poor guy. Leo found out about some of those things and he said we're going to change. We're going back to what the credit union is supposed to be.

That was music to my ears, because sometimes I gave them money to carry them over. They came up to my house on Saturdays. They needed money. The poor highway workers. They'd go out Friday night. They got paid Friday, Thursday. Friday night they'd go out, get half-tanked. They'd wind up in jail. So the police were members of the credit union. They all knew me. Uncle John! So they'd call up and they'd say to me [mimics], got one of your boys up here, John. I said you have? Who is it? So they told me. He said you know, he hasn't got any money and if he doesn't show up for work Monday, he loses his job. If he loses his job, you're going to lose some money. If you say we'll loan him the money he needs, we'll let him go. This is the police department!

MR: I love it. [Laughs] This is how things really work.

JW: They'd send a cruiser down to the City Hall, get the papers. The president of the credit union was a lieutenant in the police department. They're all members. They said if you say okay, we'll let him go. So I'd pass the papers, get the check out, call the committees, ask them. This is the situation. [Mimics conversation] But John, is the guy a good guy? Is he going to be working? Yes. Let him have it. So the guy would get the money, pay his bail, and go home, and go to work. And that's the way it went. But they don't do that. They want security, security, security.

The bank commissioner, Jim Nelson, God rest his soul. He was a good friend of mine. He was a bank examiner and they put him in charge of the credit unions. Being in politics with the governor, the governor was there, a vacancy came, Jim Nelson was a bank examiner doing the work and there was a job open for bank commissioner and he [governor] said take the job. [Nelson] said I don't want it. [Mimics] Why? You're doing the damn job. Take the job. No. We finally convinced him. He took the job and it was fine. Later he said, gee, what the hell was the matter with me? I said you walked up the main drag in Concord with your head down, I said. Did you know where the hell you were going? Did you ever bump into anybody? Christ! Pick you head up, you're bank commissioner. He said you're right; I was afraid to take the job.

But he took it and he come down to me and he says to me, where's your collateral? [Laughs] City employee. Fire-fighter. Johnny Muller. Come up to me. Had a lot of illness. His wife went to the hospital to have a baby and there were complications. He had to move. [Mimics] He says to me, John, I'm in trouble. I need money. I knew his father. I knew his mother. I knew the whole family. I knew him! He's good as gold, but he didn't have the collateral that he needed. I said to John, I've got to have collateral. What do you want, he said? I'll give you my wife. I'll give you my kids. I'll give you everything I've got. What do you want? [Laughs] I said to Jim Nelson, what the hell would you do? I said this is a friend of mine. Good as gold, I said. He hasn't got anything and you're telling me the law says I've got to take collateral? Well, he says to me, you can have my wife, you can have my kids, you can have my furniture, you can have everything I've got, but I've got to have some money now. That's my collateral, I said. [Nelson] threw his hands up in the air.

But later on, before he died, God help him, he was all alone and his mother passed away and he was all by himself. Lived in an apartment up there in Concord, but good as gold. I said to him, Jim, if you didn't have a nickel and you come in to me, and you wanted a loan, what would you think of me if I said I got to have collateral, Jim? I said would you want me, as a friend, to take care of you? [Laughs] Human nature. That's what it is. Down the credit union today, that's what they're doing. They're playing the one that's got the most gets the wish.

MR: That's the way of the world, unfortunately.

JW: Is it! It's wrong. There's good people and everybody, I don't give a damn who it is, everybody's got a little bit of good. You've got to cultivate it. If you don't cultivate it, it's going to get worse.

MR: We're starting to run out of tape, so is there anything else that you want to add? This has been marvelous. This is wonderful.

JW: This is the first time I've had an interview.

MR: Really?

JW: Really. I haven't had one interview, but I've been here. Something like this, you got to be careful. You know, you say things and it's black and white. I thought about it and, I said, I'm not saying anything that isn't true. Anybody wants to verify it, the people are gone. They can't do it. But it's all true. God bless every one of them, because they were (bastards?). And these were French people. How the hell could I say anything against another nationality? I grew up and I hung around with French, Greek, Polish. I hung around with them all. There's not enough of that in the world. Like you said, everything today is for the most. It's wrong. Wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong. Yes.



I wish I was 21, so I could get back into the groove and do some more of it, you know? There was a lot. In school, I was the worst of the worst. [Laughs] It's honest to God! My teachers, the eighth grade, that's as far as I went. When I get to the credit union, where do you think I went? I had to get members and schoolteachers were eligible for membership. I went down to the Wilson School.

Molly Drennan, God bless her soul. She said the minute that door opened, I knew someone that was in this school was coming in. Because, she said, you opened the door and you came straight to my office. I said, Miss Drennan, how the hell could I ever forget your office? I got belted in there and everything else. I said I deserved it, some; but I remember. She says to me, what took you here? I said well, I don't know whether you read the paper or not, but I'm the new treasurer of the Manchester Municipal Employees Credit Union. You as a teacher are eligible. You've been here for years. What I know of you [laughs], you've got a couple of dollars. And if you have that couple of dollars, I want you to invest it in the credit union. I said you're over the limit to get the benefit but, I said, maybe you can get some benefit, because every dollar up to two thousand, if you deposit before age 55 while you're performing the duties of your livelihood, and leave it there-- If you live to be 90 and die, they'll double it. You'll get four thousand instead of two. [Laughs]

She says to me I cannot believe what I see and hear. She called the seventh grade teacher in, Miss Sanborn, and she says do you remember him? She said I'll never forget him! [Laughs] I'll never forget him, she said! What does he want? Molly says to me tell her what you want. I got the both of them as members and Molly Drennan confided in me. She had a sister out in the Midwest and she said, John, if anything happens to me, I

want what I've got to go to my sister. Will you take care of it? I said I will. I promise you I will.

She called my girls over, that worked for me. [Laughs] She said this is your boss. Is he a good boss? The girls were embarrassed, you know? They said well, if we say yes, he'll be nice to us. If we say no, he'll come and fire us. They said no, we get along fine. She said well let me tell you. He was the worst of the worst that came to Wilson School. The day that he left, we all said thank God he's gone. He Was Awful! And she said do you know what? He's done better, he's accomplished more, than the best student that ever come out of Wilson School. I don't know how the hell that he did it but, she said, he did. And, she said, I'm glad. I'm happy.

MR: We're almost out of tape, but this is the perfect way to end. You've brought it all full circle. I'm going to say thank you very much on behalf of the city's oral history project and turn this off, okay?

JW: Yes. [End of Tape 2/Side B; end of interview]